

For immediate release  
April 18, 2007

## RIO GRANDE FLOOD CONTROL LEVEES, HABITAT RESTORATION, AND WATER SUPPLY ON AGENDA FOR MAY 2 PUBLIC MEETING IN LAS CRUCES, NM

Rio Grande issues affecting the greater Las Cruces, NM-El Paso, TX region will be on the agenda of the next public meeting of the Rio Grande Citizens' Forum (RGCF) on May 2, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., in the Dresp Room of the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, 200 East Picacho in Las Cruces. The RGCF is a public outreach program of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), which operates various Rio Grande projects in the region.

Steve Smullen, USIBWC Acting Principal Engineer, will present the latest information about plans to raise and rehabilitate Rio Grande flood control levees in the region. According to various studies, Rio Grande flood control levees in some areas could be overtopped by the 100-year flood event. The proposed levee improvements are intended to provide adequate protection against the 100-year flood. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is currently developing Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Doña Ana County, NM and El Paso County, TX to identify properties at risk of flooding. Where levees are inadequate, property owners will be subject to mandatory purchase of flood insurance.

The agenda will also include a presentation about the Rio Grande Canalization Collaborative Project. The USIBWC constructed the Rio Grande Canalization Project in the 1930s and 1940s, covering 106 river miles from Percha Dam, NM to American Dam in El Paso, TX. The project ensures delivery of water to Mexico in conformance with the Convention of 1906 and to U.S. users, such as Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) in New Mexico, El Paso County Water Improvement District #1, and the City of El Paso. The project includes 130 miles of flood control levees in New Mexico and Texas. The Collaborative Project is a welcome development in federal and private efforts to enhance habitat for fish and wildlife on the Rio Grande in Southern New Mexico. The Collaborative Project is an effort by conservation groups, EBID, and stakeholders to balance the need for flood control and water delivery with river habitat restoration. The group specifically aims to: 1) identify environmental flow needs for limited habitat restoration of the active floodplain, 2) quantify trade-offs to existing users, flood control, and sediment transport from habitat restoration efforts, 3) develop an institutional framework for management of and accounting for depletions associated with habitat restoration, and 4) investigate legal options for flexibility in dealing with the potential effects of the federal Endangered Species Act. Dr. Phil King, Associate Professor of Civil Engineering at New Mexico State University and EBID Consultant, will give a joint presentation with Beth Bardwell, Program Officer with the World Wildlife Fund-Chihuahuan Desert.

In other business, Wayne Treers, Hydraulic Engineer with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, will give an update on Rio Grande water supply forecasts for the year. This year began with promising snowpack but above-normal temperatures in February and March as well as the lack of late winter storms reduced the snowpack. Although the April 1 runoff forecast at San Marcial is 265,000 acre-feet (46% of normal), Reclamation has adjusted this figure to 185,000 acre-feet (32% of average) to take into account that some of this water will be stored upstream. Last year's runoff at San Marcial was 92,500 acre-feet (16% of normal).

The 2007 irrigation season on the Rio Grande Project began on March 7 with releases out of Caballo Reservoir. Due to the large inflows from July to November 2006 caused by an unusually heavy monsoon rainfall runoff season last summer and fall, Elephant Butte Reservoir began the irrigation season this year with very good storage levels. Based on current reservoir storage, the Project allocation is 52% of a full supply, which is greater than last year's final allocation of 51% of a full supply. Reclamation anticipates close to 63% of a fully supply for a final allocation this summer.

The RGCF will also hear from the Paso del Norte Watershed Council's Geri Quisenberry, who will discuss work on a Watershed Restoration Action Strategy, which will address non-point source bacteria. The work is being carried out thanks to a 319 (h) Watershed Restoration Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The RGCF was established by the USIBWC in 1999 to facilitate the exchange of information regarding USIBWC activities on the Rio Grande between Percha Dam, New Mexico and Fort Quitman, Texas. It is designed to bring together community members, enabling the early and continued two-way flow of information, concerns, values, and needs between USIBWC and the general public, environmentalists, irrigation districts, municipalities, and others interested in the river. Members of the Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Board, who serve as unpaid volunteers, represent a variety of interests along the Rio Grande in west Texas and southern New Mexico.

The meeting agenda is attached. Members of the public can obtain more information from Public Affairs Officer Sally Spener at 915-832-4175, [sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov](mailto:sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov).

Contact:

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## **RIO GRANDE CITIZENS' FORUM**

**Wednesday, May 2, 2007**

**6:30 - 8:30 P.M.**

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library

Dresp Room

200 East Picacho

Las Cruces, NM 88001

### **Agenda**

- Welcome and Introductions - Alisa Jorgensen, Citizens' Forum Co-Chair
- 2007 Annual Operating Plan for Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs- Wayne Treers, Hydraulic Engineer, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- Rio Grande Canalization Collaborative Project - Dr. Phil King, NMSU Assoc. Professor of Civil Engineering and Elephant Butte Irrigation District Consultant & Beth Bardwell, Program Officer, World Wildlife Fund-Chihuahuan Desert
- Rio Grande Flood Control Levees, Update on FEMA and IBWC Activities - Steve Smullen, Acting Principal Engineer, USIBWC
- Paso del Norte Watershed Council, Watershed Restoration Grant Announcement - Geri Quisenberry, Grant Coordinator, Paso del Norte Watershed Council
- Public Comment
- Board Discussion, Suggested Future Agenda Items

If you have a disability that you wish to self-identify confidentially that requires accommodation, please advise us ahead of time. For more information, call 915-832-4175 or e-mail [sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov](mailto:sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov)